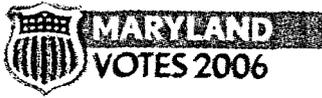


# In political battle, a 'happy warrior'

Montgomery Democrat has a few laughs and some harsh words for opponents



Fourth in a series of profiles  
of comptroller candidates

BY MICHAEL DRESSER

(SUN REPORTER)

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It was a sweltering day on North Avenue in West Baltimore, and Peter Franchot was denouncing elected officials who appear in taxpayer-funded commercials and promising never to do so if elected state comptroller.

Just then, with timing no advance team could conjure, a Maryland Transit Administration bus rumbled by sporting an advertisement with a smiling picture of Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. promoting a housing program.

"That is a moving violation of the state law," said the Montgomery County Democratic delegate, referring to a new state prohibition on spending taxpayer money for promotions that feature candidates for state office.

"He should not only lose the election; he should have some points applied to him," Franchot said with a broad grin.

With two weeks to go before the votes are counted, it is clear that Franchot is having the time of his life as he stumps the state in an attempt to pull off what would be one of the great upsets in Maryland political history: toppling the legendary William Donald Schaefer in the Sept. 12 Democratic primary.

"I'm a happy warrior," Franchot proclaims, laying claim to the nickname once applied to Hubert H. Humphrey.

To Republicans, Franchot as the state's chief tax collector and a member of the powerful Board of Public Works is a nightmare prospect. The 20-year lawmaker, who chairs an important budget subcommittee, is an unabashed partisan who hails from Takoma Park, a city regarded as ultra-liberal even by Montgomery County standards.

For months, Franchot has been cheerfully crossing the state lambasting Schaefer and Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens as representatives of the "Ehrlich wing" of the Democratic Party.

Franchot, 58, is pursuing an aggressive strategy of defining Owens — a centrist Democrat by

most measures and a supporter of Martin O'Malley for governor — as a virtual clone of Schaefer. He was the first of the candidates to air a negative campaign ad, producing a spot that labels Owens and Schaefer "peas in a pod" with Ehrlich.

Franchot's take-no-prisoners approach has appealed to many of the core activist groups that provide much of the passion in Democratic races. His poll numbers have been unimpressive, perhaps reflecting low name recognition. Despite that, he has been piling up endorsements by the bushel from labor, environmental groups, Baltimore ministers and the old-line Democratic clubs of Baltimore County's east side. He was also recently endorsed by *The Washington Post*, a potentially significant factor in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

Franchot said he sees the contest boiling down to a race between him and Owens, with Schaefer fading to a third-place finish. He brashly predicts victory with 40 percent of the vote.

Unlike the genteel Owens and the above-the-fray Schaefer, Franchot appears to relish a bare-knuckles political fight, whether on the campaign trail or in a House committee room.

As a House transportation and environment subcommittee chairman, his tussles with Transportation Secretary Robert L. Flanagan provided some of the best political theater in Annapolis the past four years. On issue after issue, the two were articulate and aggressive antagonists, but Flanagan could be provoked to anger while Franchot consistently seemed to be enjoying himself.

"I enjoy the give and take of politics," Franchot said. "When we're jousting, I keep it in perspective. Jousting is the state sport, after all."

At Flanagan's final budget hearing before Franchot's subcommittee, the two exchanged compliments on their mutual dedication to public service.

"People who would watch us from afar don't appreciate the fact we're good friends," said Flanagan. He told Franchot he re-

spects his advocacy "no matter how misguided you might be."

Where Schaefer has long been leery of making campaign appearances before less-than-friendly audiences, Franchot relishes the opportunity to engage critics head-on. He has made repeated appearances on WBAL's conservative call-in shows — at one point, coolly correcting host Ron Smith when the talk-show host pronounced his name with an exaggerated French accent.

(It's pronounced Fran-CHO. The Annapolis joke is that the "t" is the only silent thing about him.)

Though he has been accused of being a show boater, Franchot makes no apologies for seeking to stand out among the 141 members of the House of Delegates.

"I am a pragmatic, experienced, successful, progressive Democrat. I get results in the legislature. People know that," he said.

Among the accomplishments Franchot points to is a 1999 law, of which he was the lead House sponsor, that cut Maryland's real-estate closing costs and gave about 900,000 families refunds on hundreds of millions of dollars in property tax escrow payments.

"It returned more money at once than any other piece of legislation in the state," he said.

Franchot's campaign has mobilized the Democratic left wing, but the veteran lawmaker said he has taken positions at odds with his liberal-leaning district. For instance, he said, he supported construction of a football stadium in Baltimore when many Montgomery County legislators opposed it.

Contrary to the views of many in his district, Franchot supports construction of the Inter-County Connector between Interstates 95 and 270.

Franchot's legislative biography points to a privileged upbringing that included a prep school education and a degree from Amherst College. But there's also a reference to service in the Army from 1968 to 1970 during the height of the Vietnam War.

There are no tales of battlefield heroism. Franchot said he lost his draft deferment when he left Amherst to work on Sen. Eugene McCarthy's 1968 antiwar presidential campaign. Inducted that year, Franchot said, he spent his

# PETER FRANCHOT

**Date of birth:** Nov. 25, 1947

**Party affiliation:** Democrat

service at two Army bases in Texas before returning to Amherst.

Though Franchot is quick to advertise his legislative accomplishments, he seldom mentions his employment outside the legislature unless asked.

Franchot's disclosure statement's with the State Ethics Commission show that he works as a consultant with two Washington lobbying firms, Cassidy & Associates and Fabiani & Co. LLC.

Some of his critics say that makes him a lobbyist. If that were true it would neither be illegal nor unethical under state law — other Maryland lawmakers have also been federal lobbyists — but Franchot insists he is a consultant who specializes in working with not-for-profit hospitals to obtain financing from foundations and federal programs. He said he is not an employee of the firms and pays rent for office space.

"Since 1986, I have been on Capitol Hill five times, and I can remember four of them were social events," he said. The other, he said, came when he testified in favor of cable TV coverage of Washington Nationals baseball games, an issue of interest to his constituents. The last year he was registered to lobby was 1998, and he said he never did so then.

The ethics disclosures also show that the longtime legislator has done well over the years. His holdings — along with his wife, Anne Maher, a Washington lawyer — include a diversified portfolio of mutual fund investments and an \$800,000 second home on Cape Cod. He is well-heeled enough to have lent his campaign \$750,000 to fuel this race.

Franchot makes no apologies for prospering in the private sector, saying it has allowed him to have a political career while supporting a family.

"If I were to lose the election, I would have a tremendously exciting and satisfying private-sector career," he said. "Part of my cheerfulness on the campaign trail is that I don't have to win to be successful."

**Professional background:** Member, Maryland House of Delegates, 1987-present; member, Appropriations Committee, 1987-present; House chairman, Joint Committee on Federal Relations, 1995-96; chairman, public safety and administration subcommittee, 1997-99; chairman, transportation and the environment subcommittee, 1999-present.

Consultant, Cassidy & Associates, 1986-2006. Consultant, Dynamis Advisors, 2001-present; Fabiani & Co. LLC, 2004-present; special counsel to chair, Subcommittee on Energy Conservation and Power, U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce, 1985-86. Staff director, U.S. Rep. Edward J. Markey, 1980-86. Lawyer, but not practicing.

**Education:** B.A., Amherst College; J.D., Northeastern University.

**Personal:** Married 26 years to Anne Maher, lawyer in Washington; daughter, Abbe, 25; son, Nick, 22.

**If you were faced with a choice between supporting an unpalatable increase in the state property tax and protecting Maryland's AAA bond rating, as Board of Public Works members were in 2003, how would you vote?**

I would vote for tax increase. I will be a very vigorous advocate for protecting the Triple A bond rating by being honest in how we pay for and account for our obligations.

**As a member of the state pension board of trustees, would you support the investment of retirement funds to achieve social or economic development goals?**

Our No. 1 responsibility is our fiduciary duty to our teachers and public employees. My basic core philosophy is to protect the fund.

**What changes do you believe need to be made in the operation of the comptroller's office over the next four years?**

In 2005, the comptroller underestimated revenue by \$1 billion. The reason that's significant is that the General Assembly had to cut the budget and increase fees to meet the revenue figure. It was entirely unnecessary, because the revenue came in. Either the comptroller can't add or there was some other agenda. I will reform that process and take the politics out of it. As comptroller I would increase the staff that makes the revenue estimates, and I would include the private sector to make estimates as accurate as possible. On taxes, the electronic filing is doing relatively well, but the state is falling down in handling people's paper returns.